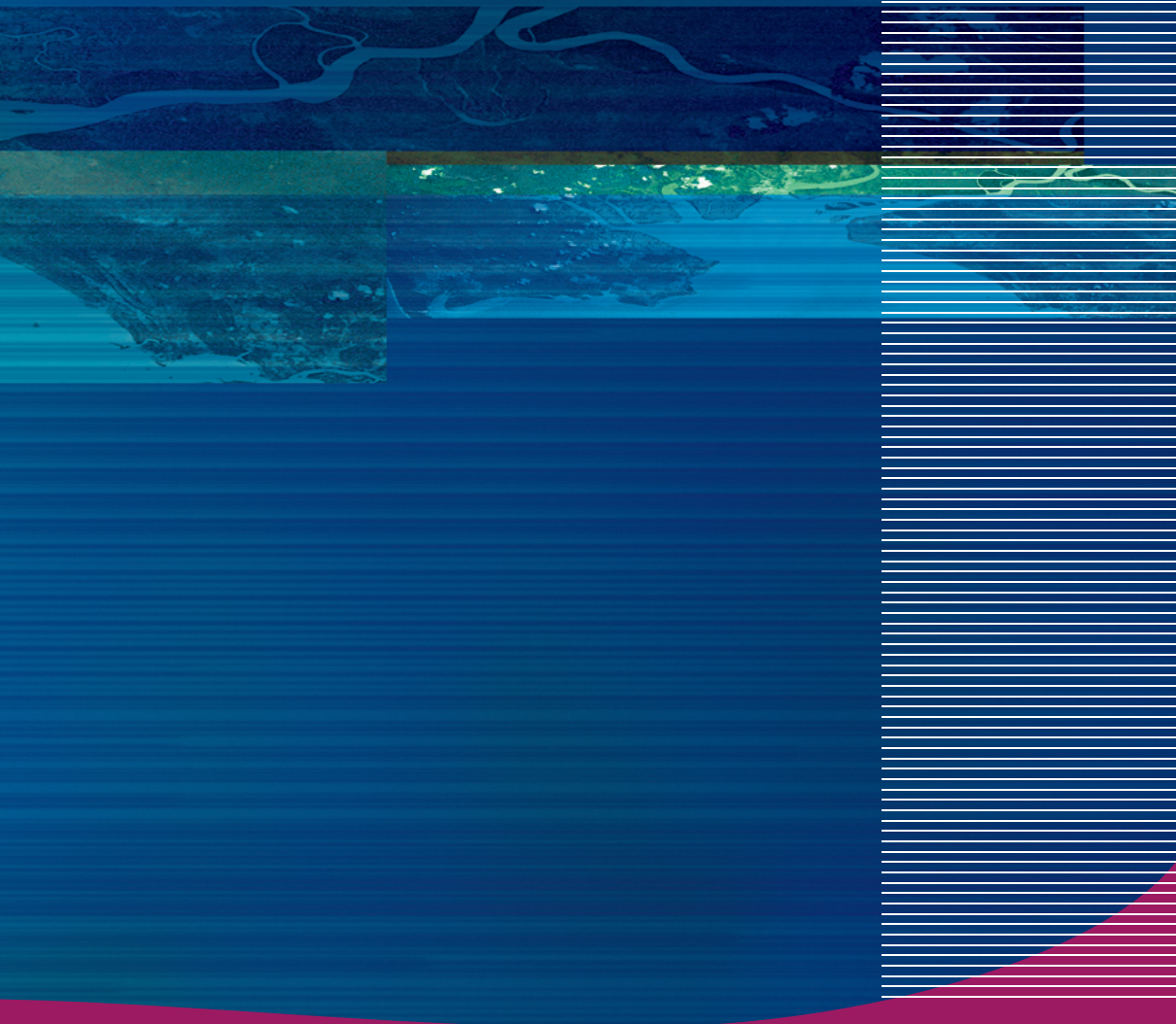


Animal rights activism in the Netherlands

Springboard for Europe



General Intelligence *and* Security Service



Per undas adversas

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1 Introduction

‘The monitoring on animal testing in the Netherlands is too “soft”. Asylum seekers have the opportunity to conduct legal proceedings against their deportation, so why can’t animal rights activists raise legal objections to animal testing?’¹

‘In the Netherlands there are scientists who with their families are continually exposed to physical and emotional threats. The state is supposed to protect its citizens but fails to come up to the mark.’²

These quotations show how supporters and opponents of animal testing deal with what is written about the subject and what they expect from the authorities. The discussion regarding animal welfare and animal rights is of immediate importance, not only from the point of view of people who carry out these tests (or let these be carried out), but also regarding the ideology and modus operandi of animal rights activists.

In June 2004, the paper ‘Dierenrechtenactivisme in Nederland - Grenzen tussen vreedzaam en vlammend protest’ (Animal rights activism in the Netherlands. Between peaceful and burning protest)³ was published. This paper was drafted by the AIVD at the request of the Lower Chamber⁴, who needed to obtain a clear distinction between the different forms of protest carried out by activists. In particular it was the intention to report when these kinds of campaigns could be labelled as terrorist actions. The investigation into animal rights activism, carried out by the AIVD in 2004, came to the following conclusion: ‘A small percentage of animal rights activists seek in a clandestine way and with violent means to change policy and practice in the area of animal welfare. Similar to, and under the influence of, the situation in the United Kingdom, this small percentage of radical animal rights activists, who use violent means against other people, are shifting dangerously towards the borderline which is considered as terrorism.’

As mentioned in the 2004 paper, most campaigns are carried out by people who belong to the groups ranged under civil disobedience in the middle part of the activism pyramid, described in the 2004 paper, which acts as a transitional stage for potential

¹ Professor Bernd van der Meulen, co-author of ‘Een noodzakelijk Kwaad’ (A Necessary Evil).

5 ² (Kees Brunia and Jan Hoeijmakers, in reaction to ‘Een noodzakelijk Kwaad.’)

³ TK 2003-2004, 29 200 VI, no. 175.

⁴ Ministerial promise BZK, TK 2003-2004, 29 037, no. 2.

radical activists. These campaigns are mainly blockades and sit-in actions, but also so-called 'home visits.'

This paper is meant to bring the reader up to date on the latest developments and the current state of affairs concerning Dutch animal rights activism. Several developments in an international context will be described in further detail, in particular the increasingly important role of Dutch activists. At first an overall picture will be sketched which will show that recently a number of companies have less to fear from (partly radical) campaigns. In addition, the group *Respect voor Dieren (RvD)*, founded in 2004, will be focused on, due to the fact that this group has developed into the most important animal rights activist group in the Netherlands. Other groups have over the last few years fallen by the wayside for one reason or another. Furthermore, international cooperation regarding animal rights activism and the recently developed policy concerning animal rights activism in other countries will be briefly discussed. The paper will be concluded with a summary.

2 Animal rights activism in the Netherlands

An update

As mentioned in the 2004 AIVD paper Dutch animal rights activism is characterised by a tripartite segmentation: a number of activists are active from a left-wing perspective, others have extreme right sympathies, but the majority do not have the need for a political message. This last category let themselves be led by emotions and frustration about how people treat animals in general, and laboratory animals in particular.

A percentage of 'left-wing' animal rights activists desire to do more than act in this area. In the past year especially, this group (of mainly individuals) has also been active in the area of anti-fascism, an area in which they are also active abroad, as well as resisting against Dutch (and European) asylum and immigration policies. A small percentage can be seen as anarcho-autonomous⁵ and, as broadly defined professional activists, are also present at (international) anti-globalist gatherings and squatter's riots. On the right-wing side of things, the group *Met de Dieren tegen de Beesten* (With the Animals against the Beasts) is in the spotlight in particular. They mainly focus on campaigns against Islamic butchershops, but because of their loathing for American achievements, they also sometimes focus their campaigns against McDonalds.

In 2006 violent campaigns were carried out which were not claimed by any group. An unknown group attempted an arson attack at a branch of McDonalds, a company which usually comes into contact with left-wing activists. Also a butcher's delivery van in Vught was the target of an arson attack. Another regular target for moderate, as well as radical, activists is the Biomedical Primate Research Centre (BPRC) in Rijswijk, although the company has seen no protests for more than a year. This has to do with the main action group camping with internal problems, as well as the fact that the centre has ceased its research on apes.

The movement 'Straight Edge' is still the uniting factor of extremely fanatical animal rights activists. This movement is characterised by an extreme form of veganism. Its

⁵ Anarcho-autonomous people are radical activists who not always have a political message. They are often ex-squatters, and for many violence is not a means but a goal.

supporters are active in the fight against animal suffering, partly using violent means in order to do this. There is no room for any expansion into other activist areas (left nor right-wing); animals are their only concern. The basic principles are adhered to by, for example, a number of activists within *Respect voor Dieren*, which will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

In the past year developments in the United Kingdom (in particular stricter legislation) have caused that campaigns are spread to the European continent. These are often organised by Dutch activists but partly carried out by the British and other nationalities. The Netherlands played a big part in this, a part played with verve which will be further elaborated in Chapter 3.

For some years, but especially after June 2006, an increasing number of campaigns aimed at individuals has taken place. The number of so-called 'home visits,' which mostly involve late night noise campaigns at the residences of company directors and researchers of pharmaceutical firms, has risen rapidly. Besides verbal violence, such as threatening telephone calls at night to employees as well as to family members, there are also many cases of the daubing of slogans and the vandalising of cars and homes. In this way, activists try to achieve that their targets seek other employment, with the ultimate goal that the companies in question renounce their business contacts, in particular with Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS). HLS carries out animal testing on behalf of the (bio)pharmaceutical, veterinary, and food industries.

Since mid February 2007, financial contacts of Huntingdon Life Sciences (NYSE, Euronext, Van der Moolen) have also been targets of campaigns. Besides 'legal demonstrations' at companies and institutions, 'home visits' are also now being carried out in which vandalising has occurred. Since the beginning of 2007 these campaigns against animal testing (and its financial support and facility support services) are being partly carried out by a group called *Anti Dierproeven Coalitie* (ADC), active within *RvD* which also has a Belgian branch.

Another relevant development is the publication of the report 'Een Noodzakelijk Kwaad,' of which the introductory and revealing quotation comes from, popular among activists. In response to the twenty-five year anniversary of the Experiments on Animals Act (Wod), the former Minister Hoogervorst of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) decided to have an evaluation carried out by the University of Wageningen. In March 2005, the report 'Een Noodzakelijk Kwaad - Evaluatie Wet op de dierproeven' (A Necessary Evil – Evaluation on the Experiments on Animals Act) appeared. This pleased the groups which concern themselves with the welfare and

rights of animals. Scientists and experts on animal testing on the other hand highly disagreed with some of its conclusions and recommendations. Especially the fact that ‘Wageningen’ was requested to conduct the evaluation raised many questions: it is just like asking a child if it likes sweets, i.e. the outcome is predictable. For that matter, the above-mentioned report barely affected the more radical of activists. They make their own plans. However, the relevance of the report in this is that any policy consequences, connected to the report, can lead to a heightened level of transparency. In turn, this can lead to the radicalisation of a percentage of animal rights activists. In this way they gain, after all, a better insight in what is precisely happening and who is doing it. Also failing to follow up on these recommendations can lead to a high level of unrest, or worse.

With the appearance of the new political party ‘*Partij voor de Dieren*’ (Party for the Animals), a political dimension has been added to activism in the Netherlands. The paper, ‘Animal rights activism in the Netherlands. Between peaceful and burning protest’ of July 2004 examined the party’s spokesman expressed fear. She understood that in the investigation into animal rights activism no differentiation would be made between violent activists and people who devoted themselves to the welfare of animals. The paper did take away her fears, as was made clear in the media. In fact, as stated in the AIVD investigation, it can be said that radical activists to a large extent react against their ‘political’ sympathisers. The *Partij voor de Dieren* is in their view a ‘soft’ organisation which may devote themselves to animal ‘welfare’ but not to their rights, and so there is a clear distinction between the *Partij voor de Dieren* and the radical section of Dutch animal right activists.

3 Respect voor Dieren (Respect for Animals)

‘Animal liberation is a political goal and that makes the movement and *Respect voor Dieren* political. That does not take away the fact that we as action group will not take sides nor tie ourselves down to empty concepts such as ‘left’ and ‘right.’ The parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politicians have seen the animals too long as a matter of minor importance. Didn’t *GroenLinks* (left-wing political party focused on the environment) agree to keep BPRC open?’ With this quotation by Jan Kramer, an alias of the most prominent spokesman of *Respect voor Dieren*, the RvD was characterised from British example as a broad organisation in which everybody is welcome. A political preference is not important; it is the animal which counts.

RvD was founded by a well-known Dutch animal rights activist, who was jailed in Denmark in 2000/2001 for ten months where he was arrested (and convicted) on suspicion of releasing minks. The organisation was established in Amsterdam, but meanwhile has autonomous branches in Rotterdam, the north of the Netherlands and in Belgium. RvD calls itself a ‘no-nonsense’ animal rights group which strives for a complete ban on the use of animals in any way whatsoever.

Initially RvD seemed to be a group which in its campaigns was hardly to be differentiated from other like-minded groups. The only thing which was remarkable was that the organisation focused in particular on the fur trade, of which the Amsterdam branch of *Maison de Bonneterie*, a luxurious department store, had to take the rap for in particular. Up till now more than twenty campaigns have been carried out against the fur trade. Picket lines were set up, where among other matters, potential customers of fur shops were admonished but also sit-ins were carried out. Furthermore, RvD stimulated the Dutch population to send ‘polite protest e-mails.’

In the course of 2005, it became clear that RvD was increasingly viewed as the Dutch subsidiary of the British group Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC). SHAC focuses on the large animal testing laboratory Huntingdon Life Sciences, but because of the repressive approach by the authorities in the United Kingdom, they are severely curtailed in their activities. RvD expressly deals with SHAC’s agenda. Prominent SHAC figures are often present at RvD campaigns in the Netherlands. Reports of the campaigns carried out by RvD (and since 2007 also by ADC) are placed, often on the same day, on their own website: www.respectvoordieren.nl, on www.stopdierproeven.org, as well as on that of SHAC itself, www.shac.net. RvD’s activities are practically

without exception focused on companies which are mentioned on the SHAC target list. These companies are all affiliated in one way or another with the British animal testing laboratory Huntingdon Life Sciences. Targets are mainly establishments and homes of board members and researchers of pharmaceutical companies, such as Novartis, Roche, GlaxoSmithKline, but also suppliers and general and technical services companies, such as UPS.

The most conspicuous action carried out by British activists 'partly sympathising with SHAC' was the exhumation of the human remains of a family member of the owner of New Church Guinea Pigs farm. This was eventually the reason for this breeder of laboratory animals to end operations in August 2005. This was cause for great joy among SHAC members and other (Dutch) animal rights activists. It has emerged that Dutch animal rights activists also agreed with the above-mentioned method, i.e. the exhumation of human remains as a means of coercion, seen from the discussion carried out on diverse internet forums⁶.

3.1 Radicalisation in the modus operandi *Respect voor Dieren*

During the course of 2005 a steady radicalisation in the modus operandi of *Respect voor Dieren* could be discerned. Initially, only open campaigns at companies were carried out ('legal' demonstrations). However, gradually, an increasing number of people were besieged in their home environment where several felt endangered to such an extent that they had to report it to the police. For example, at an RvD campaign in Landsmeer, employees of FisherEmergo were confronted with comments such as "This can also happen to you!"; referring to the exhumation of human remains in the United Kingdom, mentioned before.

At first, activists approached their opponents with uncovered faces, in other words, without masks and similar headgear. This resulted that some RvD members were recognised. In later campaigns however, faces became partially covered. In the meantime balaclavas and similar disguises are used when undertaking more covert campaigns. The British section of SHAC is gradually leaning more and more on their Dutch comrades; as a result the Dutch are becoming increasingly active abroad. For

⁶ The following quotation of a British sympathiser can serve as an example regarding the mentality of these activists: 'While I do not condone digging up an elderly lady, I definitely don't condemn it. After all, a corpse is only a pile of bones or lump of meat and I don't understand why we have all this fuss about the dead.'

example, a Dutch delegation of RvD was involved in activities in Finland for the first time in the summer of 2005. RvD's aid was also called for at campaigns in other West European countries (Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland). RvD played an increasing role in leading and coordinating campaigns. Because of this, there is a risk that the image of the Netherlands in general will be damaged due to the involvement of Dutch citizens in campaigns carried out abroad.

During the course of 2005, RvD also took upon itself, without SHAC's authorization, to increasingly concentrate on sabotaging the activities of the travel agency Thomas Cook. This was caused by the fact that Thomas Cook was organising holidays to Mauritius where they were taking monkeys, on the return flight to Europe, to become laboratory animals. RvD carried out dozens of campaigns in the Netherlands and abroad, varying from taking up posts at Thomas Cook branches to vandalism and making threats to employees. The KLM also became indirectly involved: its business partner Air France is responsible for the transport of monkeys for animal experiments. However, up till now there have only been campaigns carried out against Air France, and not against KLM.

In January 2006, the AIVD concluded from the ongoing investigation that there was a distinct possibility that from that moment onwards activities would be prepared and carried out in a less open manner. This was partly due to the fact that the British authorities began to treat public displays of dissatisfaction with more force. A number of activists shifted their activities to the European continent, including the Netherlands, and to activities at night such as vandalising cars and besieging residences. Nevertheless, in addition, the so-called 'open demonstrations' continued to be carried out at burglar-proof (with cameras) commercial premises. A certain radicalisation of campaigns, in the shape of threats to people at home, has already taken place. Potential violence against people, the next step in campaign methods, cannot be totally ruled out in advance in the Netherlands, partly due to the close cooperation with SHAC activists.

3.2 The Financing of activities at Respect voor Dieren

A continually recurring interesting item is the matter of finance. How can individuals, who often only have occasional jobs or are even unemployed, have the necessary fluid assets to set up a major (European) campaign? The answer is charity. RvD does not have to make a lot of effort in order to gain money, nor do they have to resort to illegal means. Many Dutch individuals, and certainly the British public, are charitable. RvD has discovered a couple of methods to support themselves. The simplest way is to

appeal to SHAC, the mother organisation. In addition, it has proven to be lucrative for SHAC, as well as for RvD, to make a collection on Oxford Street, or on any other shopping street in London. This is a quick way to earn several hundreds, if not a couple of thousand, of British Pounds. Also Dutch shopping centres are popular in bringing in campaign money. A third possibility is making use of the phenomenon of 'benefits' which is well-known among activists. This implies that part of the profit made in alternative cafés is placed at the disposal of a charitable goal.

3.3 Recent developments regarding Respect voor Dieren

At the end of June 2006 an animal rights gathering was held in Tonbridge (Kent) in the United Kingdom where the Dutch were highly represented, in particular due to the presence of RvD. The outcome of the gathering was that RvD was allocated the role of pioneer as regards the campaigns on the European continent, which they have lived up to by now. It was also decided in Tonbridge that in future more attention should be paid to the campaign method 'home visits.' Staff members and researchers, especially those of pharmaceutical companies, would be harassed more than before in their home environment.

For these reasons, the AIVD has begun, with the aid of the RIDs (Regional Intelligence Services), an informative series of gatherings past organisations and individuals who are the main focus of RvD. At these gatherings, information is shared regarding the modus operandi and the expected plans of the animal rights activists. The goal of these gatherings is on the one hand to make the actual threat known and to exhort the attendees to take their own security measures. On the other hand, the AIVD requests the companies concerned to share relevant information regarding the attention they are receiving from activists.

Ever since the international gathering of animal activists in Kent, RvD is strongly focused on Europe. Campaigns in the Netherlands itself also continue to take place. In these campaigns, British activists also take part. Recently, RvD has split into two groups which more or less operate autonomously. Several individuals, who continue to bear the name of RvD, occupy themselves with the promotion of veganism and anti-fur campaigns; another group, under the name *Anti Dierproeven Coalitie* (ADC, Anti Animal Testing Coalition), mainly targets people and organisations who deal with animal testing or their financial support and facility support services. Furthermore, financial contacts are also involved (Van der Moolen, Euronext).

This year *Respect voor Dieren/Anti Dierproeven Coalitie* are responsible for the next international animal rights gathering. It will be preceded by a demonstration in Amsterdam.

4 Current foreign policy

The AIVD is investigating animal rights activism together with a large number of mainly European police forces and intelligence services. It has become clear that each country in its own way is counteracting activities of radical animal rights activists. Criminal prosecution differs from country to country, which often hampers the tracing and the handling of incidents.

At the moment, the United States has the most severe legislation. Radical forms of animal rights activism, but also environmentalism, are considered as ‘Eco-terrorism.’ Referring to the *Animal Liberation Front* (ALF), the FBI’s deputy assistant director for counter-terrorism, John Lewis, told a Senate committee that ‘animal rights and environmental activists resorting to arson and explosives are the nation’s top domestic terrorism threat⁷.’ The punishments dealt out to animal and environmental rights activists are a reflection of this view. For example, in California, Jeffrey Luers, an environmental activist, was sentenced to nearly twenty-three years of imprisonment; the consequence of setting fire to three large four-wheel drives. Solidarity demonstrations have been held recently in the Netherlands for Jeffrey Luers.

In the United Kingdom the activities of SHAC activists have mainly been curtailed by the Protection from Harassment Act, the so-called anti-stalking article. It is forbidden for activists to come within a radius of a few hundred metres of certain companies and residences. This has led to a relocation of many activities to the European continent and to the United States, despite its severe legislation, as well as to Canada.

Also Scandinavia has developed a policy to counteract radical actions against animal suffering. At the moment in one of the countries a new law is in its developmental stage, the so-called ‘extortion act.’ In this act it will be laid down that individuals, who by their acts cause the disruption of business, will be sentenced to two years of imprisonment or will be charged with a heavy fine. In another Scandinavian country, a policy has been in place for some years now that by means of information potential targets can prepare themselves for possible campaigns carried out by animal rights activists. To that end meetings have taken place with companies who are active in the

⁷ Wisconsin State Journal, ‘Battleground between research, animal rights activists,’ 21 June 2005.

field of biotechnology and in particular with mink farms. However, this preventative action could not prevent that not long ago several directors experienced 'home visits.' One of the organisers of this action was incidentally the leader of *Respect voor Dieren*.

The AIVD is following the methods of these North European colleagues for some time now. The attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington and more specifically the measures taken by insurance companies after the events as a terrorism clause (in which damage caused by terrorists or activists is not compensated) have temporarily caused a decrease in reports by the companies in question. In the meantime there is once more a cooperation to their mutual satisfaction.

5 Summary

- Since the publication of the AIVD report ‘Animal rights activism in the Netherlands. Between peaceful and burning protest,’ there has been no increase in the number of large-scale acts of vandalism (for example, through arson). In addition, peace returned in 2005 at the Biomedical Primate Research Centre (BPRC). However, there has been an increase in the number of campaigns aimed at people, in the shape of so-called ‘home visits.’ These consist of campaigns (often at night) from animal rights activists at the homes of directors and researchers of pharmaceutical companies. In addition to verbal violence and threats, there have been many cases of vandalism (cars, in particular).
- In September 2005 the report ‘Een Noodzakelijk Kwaad’ (A Necessary Evil) came out. This evaluation of twenty-five years of the Experiments on Animals Act (Wod) caused a keen discussion between the opponents and supporters of animal testing. When the recommendations, which seem reasonably fair to animal rights activists, are not implemented, this can lead to a further hardening of the points of view and radicalisation of current animal rights activism, according to the AIVD.
- *Respect voor Dieren* (RvD) has been active since November 2004. In addition to the main headquarters in Amsterdam, additional branches have now been set up to the north of the Netherlands, Rotterdam, and in Belgium. In a short period of time, RvD has grown to become the most active action group in the Netherlands. They are in fact the representative of SHAC in the Netherlands, and are increasingly requested to carry out campaigns in Western Europe. In the meantime RvD has become the coordinator for ‘home visits’ on the European continent. The activities of RvD are becoming increasingly radical. Not only do they make growing use of disguises, it seems that the number of acts of vandalism and threats is also increasing. There is no lack of liquid assets. The leader of *Respect voor Dieren/Anti Dierproeven Coalitie* plays an important role in campaigns carried out on the European continent.
- The AIVD has begun an informative series of sessions for organisations and individuals who are the main focus of *Respect voor Dieren/Anti Dierproeven Coalitie*. The goal of these sessions is in order to bring the relevant companies up to date of the modus operandi, but also of the expected plans of the animal rights activists. On the one hand, the AIVD wishes to inform them of the actual threat and to call attention to the security measures which the companies should take. On the other

hand, the AIVD is trying to persuade these companies to give them and/or the investigative authorities any relevant information regarding possible activist attention for their company (via the Regional Intelligence Services).

- In several countries, a policy has been developed to counteract the activities of violent animal rights activists in particular. This varies from repressive measures, such as a more severe legislation (in particular the United States and United Kingdom) to preventative measures, such as cooperation with the companies threatened by campaigns (for example, in the Netherlands).

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